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Afghan Rejection of Soviet Protest

It appears that the USSR will not take immediate, drastic action following the Afghan rejection of its protest that French oil-drilling operations in northern Afghanistan would violate the Soviet-Afghan non-aggression treaty of 1920.

If French operations and the economic surveys now being conducted by United Nations experts are not postponed or cancelled, however, the USSR has various courses of action. These include: additional diplomatic protests; a propaganda barrage; trade restrictions which might strangle the north Afghan economy and, if they included a ban on gasoline shipments, the whole Afghan transportation system; and attempts to subvert Afghans closely related to the Soviet Uzbek, Tadjik, and Khirgiz tribesmen.

Afghan ability to withstand such pressures would depend on the political, economic, and military support available from the West. It would also depend on the solution of specialized problems such as the Pushtoonistan issue. Soviet trade restrictions would leave Afghanistan dependent on Pakistan as a source of gasoline and as an outlet for Afghan exports. Pakistan would be sorely tempted to capitalize on this situation to force Afghan capitulation on the Pushtoonistan question.

Although the American Embassy in Kabul believes a settlement of the Pushtoonistan question may now be possible, the Afghan Foreign Minister's statements on the subject may be interpreted as a plea for American support in obtaining concessions from Pakistan at this critical juncture rather than as an expression of Afghan willingness to retreat from its demand that Pushtu-speaking tribesmen in Pakistan be given autonomy.

Britain has tentatively suggested a joint British-American approach to the Afghans, assuring them of Western moral support against Russia and urging settlement of the Pushtoonistan issue. The Afghan Government may react coolly to such an approach, however, because of its traditional and deep-seated suspicion of Britain.

State Dept. review completed

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